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NOTE ON SMALL RED AND GREEN GALLS OR SWELLINGS ON
UPPER SURFACE OF SILVER MAPLE LEAVES

The galls are caused by a small mite of microscopic size, commonly known as the maple bladder gall mite, which works and feeds inside the leaf tissue. This mite is widely distributed in the East and in some seasons is fairly prevalent around Washington, D. C. This particular species attacks only maples, particularly silver or soft maple, and does not attack other plants.

Usually the mite causes no serious injury to the tree because normally only a small percent of the leaves are infested to an extent that causes them to shrivel or cease functioning. The pest also fluctuates in abundance from year to year. It may be numerous on certain individual trees for a season or two and then practically disappear for a time. Consequently, there need be little concern regarding these infestations.

In the fall the mites abandon the leaves and crawl to the twigs where they hibernate over winter, principally under the bud scales. As soon as the new leaves start out they enter the tender leaf tissue and stimulate these peculiar growths or galls.

On valuable maple trees where this type of infestation is objectionable, or it is desired to avoid a possible repetition of the condition the following season, the mites can be controlled rather satisfactorily by spraying in the spring when the leaf buds are starting to swell, about the time the maples are in bloom. One of the commercial miscible oil sprays sold on the market, diluted for spraying dormant trees, is very effective for this purpose. The spray applied at this time in early spring kills the exposed mites which are becoming active on the twigs following winter hibernation, and thus prevents their entering the new leaf tissue.

Spraying is of no value after the leaves come out and the galls have formed, since the mites are protected inside the galls and cannot be reached with the spray solution. On small trees the abundance of mites could be reduced by picking off the most heavily infested leaves, or where a few individual branches carry most of the infestation these could be cut off. The mites inside the leaves would then die as soon as the foliage dried out. Such measures, however, would hardly be justified on large trees, or in cases where cutting certain branches would destroy the symmetry of the tree, since the mites seldom cause any serious injury and no permanent damage.

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Division of Forest Insect Investigations

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